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WOMEN IN INDUSTRY: THE MANUFACTURE OF BOOTS AND SHOES *

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Unlike the manufacture of cloth, the making of boots and shoes was not, historically, a woman's industry. Shoemaking or cobbling was considered "men's work" almost as universally as spinning was looked upon as work for women. Yet in this country, throughout the nineteenth century, women found one of their most important occupations in the manufacture of boots and shoes and in the 1905 *Census of Manufactures* it ranks second after the textile industries in the number of its women employees. Women, however, were never "shoemakers" in any proper sense of that term, and their relation to the industry only begins with the introduction of the system of division of labor which was in use for more than half a century before machinery and the factory system revolutionized the industry.

The application of labor-saving machinery to the manufacture of boots and shoes belongs to a comparatively recent chapter in our industrial history. There is no other of our important manufacturing industries in which machinery has so recently displaced hand methods, and in which the displacement has been so swiftly successful and complete. Although for more than fifty years after the establishment of the first cotton mill in Massachusetts, shoes continued to be made after primitive hand methods, at the present time even the smallest details of the process of manufacture are done by machinery.

The history of the manufacture of boots and shoes in this country divides itself into three different periods: (1) the colonial period in which the work was done entirely by men—

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village shoemakers, or cobblers, or cordwainers; (2) a period which extended, roughly, from the latter part of the fifteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth, and in which, under a system of division of labor, women became an important factor in the industry; (3) the modern period which has witnessed the introduction of machinery and the establishment of the factory system, and in which women's labor has become increasingly important.¹

Of the first period little need be said. Boots and shoes were made by the village shoemaker who kept a shop or went from house to house repairing and making shoes for the family once a year. Sometimes he procured a little leather and made it into shoes which were bartered at a neighboring store, and it gradually became customary for storekeepers to carry a few ready-made shoes for sale.²

In the latter half of the eighteenth century more of this ready-made work was done and a considerable wholesale trade developed. During the revolutionary war the domestic industry was able to furnish shoes for the continental army, and southern planters began to depend on Massachusetts to supply the brogans which were worn by the negroes. By 1795, 300,000 pairs of ladies' shoes were produced in Lynn, and it was estimated that 200 master workmen and 600 journeymen were employed there.³ From 1800 to 1810 the population of Lynn is said to have increased 50 per cent., an increase attributed to the growing opportunity for employment in the boot and shoe industry.

¹ In Mr. H. P. Fairchild's article on shoemaking in Shaler's *United States of America*, pp. 178 ff., these periods are more exactly defined. The first period, the period of the cordwainer, is said to extend from 1629 to 1750; the second period, "from a trade to a manufacturing industry," from 1750 to 1850; third period, "the steam-power factory," from 1850 to 1892. See also, the *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor* on "Hand and Machine Labor," I, 113, for a somewhat different account of the periods through which the industry has passed.

² Bradford Kingman, *History of North Bridgewater*, Boston, 1866, pp. 402, 403.

³ *One Hundred Years of American Commerce*, II, 567. The article on the "Boot and Shoe Trade" is by William B. Rice.

This large and prosperous trade, however, could not have been worked out on the village-cobbler system alone. Along with the expansion of the industry, a system of division of labor was developed which greatly increased the possible output. This system came into existence very gradually, and the latter half of the eighteenth century was a time of transition from the period of the individual shoemaker making the whole boot and shoe, to the period of the "team" when the work was subdivided and one man carried on only a single process.⁴

During the first period and, for the most part, during the experimental time of transition, the industry was exclusively in the hands of men. Journeymen and master workmen alike were exclusively men and no women were employed at any part of the work. Shoe shops large enough to accommodate the three or four workmen who constituted a team soon became common in the more enterprising shoe towns. Prosperous shoemakers became manufacturers in a small way by hiring a few neighbors to work with them in the shop. It was natural, under the circumstances, to make some division of labor, and it became customary to have the cutting of the leather done by one man, the work of fitting and sewing the uppers done by another, and to have still another exclusively employed in fastening the uppers to the soles. This system, in which each workman carried on a single process, was found to be vastly superior to the more primitive method of having the whole shoe made by a single workman.

Shoemakers were not slow in discovering that, under the new system, the labor of the women and children in the family could be utilized by giving them the uppers to be stitched and bound in the home, and then returned to the shop to have the soles put on by the men. "Stitching and binding" thus came to be exclusively women's work during the first half of the nineteenth century. Work in the shops was confined to cutting, bottoming, finishing, and packing to send to market; and all through eastern Massachusetts women in or near the "shoe towns" became in a measure self-supporting by getting shoes to bind. As early as

⁴ See 1905 *Census of Manufactures*, III, 242.

1810, it was reported that the women binders of Lynn alone had earned \$50,000 in the course of that year.⁵ From the beginning, Lynn shoemakers made a specialty of the manufacture of ladies' shoes, and this perhaps accounts in part for the large proportion of women always employed there; for the work of these Lynn shoeworkers was much lighter and less fatiguing than the heavy work of the old cobblers, or of the makers of men's shoes.⁷

A change of some importance followed the invention of the wooden shoe peg in 1811. Nearly all shoes were sewed before this time and premiums had been offered for the invention of machines which would enable shoemakers to work in a standing position and thus relieve the pressure upon the breast which came from holding the shoe and the fatigue caused by the stooping position which was necessary while sewing;⁸ but improvements came slowly. After the introduction of the pegging machine, however, the work of "bottoming" became much easier, so that boys and even women could peg shoes while they could not be advantageously employed on the heavy sewed work.⁹

With the impetus given by the success of the attempts at a division of labor, the industry grew rapidly and many so-called "factories" were established in the large centers. These factories, however, were merely small buildings from which the large dealers gave out materials to be worked up by shoemakers on the domestic or commission system, very much as the early cotton "manufactories" gave out the yarn to be woven by weavers in their own homes.¹⁰ These shoe dealers, or manufacturers as they were called, used the factories as a place where they accumulated materials, had the different kinds of leather cut into "uppers" and understock, and from which they gave out work to be made up all through the surrounding country in shoemakers' shops or binders' homes. The finished shoes were then

⁵ Hurd, *History of Essex County*, I, 284.

⁶ The work of making ladies' shoes is still kept more or less segregated. Just as Lynn has always been the center of the manufacture of ladies' shoes, Brockton makes a specialty of manufacturing men's shoes.

⁷ Johnson, *Sketches of Lynn*, p. 4.

⁸ 1905 *Census of Manufactures*, III, 242.

⁹ Kingman, p. 402.

¹⁰ See pp. 342, 358, for a description of this system.

returned to the factory, and, after being packed in boxes, were distributed to the various markets throughout the country.

But it is clear that very little, if any, of the work was done in the so-called factory. Shoes were still made in the little "eight-by-ten" shops where the shoemaker and his sons, or a few neighbors, made a team; and in the home where the women and girls did the stitching and binding and, for fancy slippers, the trimming and ornamenting. In the shop, although cutters were not needed when the stock was received from the factory ready to be made up, work was still found for a team. One man did the lasting, the necessary stretching and fitting of the upper to the sole, another did the pegging, "the boys, and sometimes the girls, were taught this branch, and still another the eye setting, but all was done by hand."¹¹

While much of the work was given out by "factories" which employed a large number of workpeople and marketed the product on a large scale, there were many petty employers in the trade at this time. The men who were known as "bag-bosses" were of this class, and their name originated from their custom of taking one or two dozen pairs of shoes in a bag to Boston to be traded off for whatever could be got in exchange.¹²

With the increased efficiency which followed as a result of the improved methods of production, the manufacture of boots and shoes became a large and prosperous industry in spite of the lack of labor-saving machinery. The work continued to be done almost exclusively by hand until after the close of the first half of the nineteenth century, and during this time shoemaking was still regarded as a skilled trade, a craft to which boys were regularly apprenticed for a term of seven years. This fact of the boy's long apprenticeship illustrates the difference between the relation of men and women to the trade. Although the labor of women was an important factor in the development of the industry, yet they were almost exclusively employed in sewing

¹¹ *One Hundred Years of American Commerce*, 567. Other accounts of the industry at this period are to be found in the *Twelfth Census of Manufactures*, III, 754, 755, and *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor*, I, 113.

¹² Johnson, *Lynn*, p. 14. The bag-bosses belonged to the period about 1830.

or binding, and their position was very different from that of the men who had learned all the processes. The women carried on a single, narrowly defined part of the work, for which little or no skill was required, and for which they were never apprenticed; the men knew the whole trade and had been rigidly held down to a long period of training.

Since the women did their work in their own homes, much of it was done only at times when they were not engaged in household duties. Any statements, therefore, of the total number of women employed in the industry must have included a large number who did not give full time to the work; but such early statistics of the number of women shoebinders and stitchers as are available are of interest, even if they are only estimates. In 1829, the city of Lynn contained 62 factories, which were said to employ 1,500 "mechanics" and about the same number of women. The latter, said a local historian, "are engaged in binding and trimming, and by their industry and economy contribute to the support and respectability of their families."¹³

The factories of Lynn, however, gave a great deal of work out to the women of the neighboring towns and villages as well as to those within the city. In the fishing villages of the coast where shoemaking was a winter occupation for fishermen, their wives and daughters found employment at shoebinding through a great part of the year. The village of Marblehead in 1831 reported 51 men, 134 women, and a considerable number of boys engaged in the boot and shoe industry. Lucy Larcom in an early poem, "Hannah at the Window, Binding Shoes," describes one of these shoebinders forever watching for the return of the lover who has been lost at sea:

Poor lone Hannah
 Sitting at the window, binding shoes;
 Faded, wrinkled,
 Sitting stitching in a mournful muse,

 Spring and winter,
 Night and morning,
 Hannah's at the window, binding shoes.

¹³ Alonzo Lewis, *History of Lynn* (Boston, 1829).

Further information regarding the extent to which women were employed in the manufacture of shoes is found in the collection of data in the *Documents Relative to the Manufactures of the United States*¹⁴ which were gathered in 1832 by the secretary of the treasury. The industry at this time was largely confined to the towns of eastern Massachusetts, and some interesting statements of the number of men and women working at the trade and the wages they were receiving are given for these shoemaking centers. While it must be recognized that these statistics are for the most part very crude estimates, the enumeration of some of them may be useful as a means of giving a more concrete idea of the extent to which women were engaged in this work.

At Haverhill, one of the oldest shoe-manufacturing towns in the state, 586 men, 130 boys, and 265 women were employed; most of the women earned 20 cents a day and the men 70; at Salem there were 300 men at five shillings and sixpence a day, and 250 women at two shillings a day; at Malden, 275 men at one dollar; 200 women at 25 cents, and 25 boys at 50 cents; at Randolph, 470 men at 80 cents, 300 women at 40 cents, and 200 boys at the same wages as the women; at Newbury and Newburyport, 155 men were getting from seventy to eighty-four cents a day, and 120 women from fifteen to twenty-five cents;¹⁵ at Marblehead, where more than 130 women were reported employed, many of them earned only eight or nine cents a day, though the majority got as much as twelve.

More than sixteen hundred women and girls were employed in Lynn, and their wages ranged from twelve cents to fifty cents a day, although very few were employed either at

¹⁴ *Executive Documents*, Twenty-second Congress, 1st Sess., Vols. I, II.

¹⁵ Similar reports came from a large number of other towns; thus at Stoneham 200 men were employed at 75 cents, 120 women at 33 cents, and 50 boys at the latter wage; at South Reading 350 men at 75 cents, 100 women at 25 cents, and 50 boys at 30 cents; at Stoughton, 150 men at 83 cents, and 100 women at 40 cents; at Abington, 300 men at 75 cents, 150 women at 25 cents, and 200 boys at 33 cents; at Weymouth, 300 men at one dollar, 100 at 50 cents, and 50 boys at the same wage; at Reading, 238 men at 65 cents, 150 women at 25 cents, and 72 boys at the same wage.

the highest or the lowest wage: about the same number of men were employed for wages ranging from thirty-five cents to \$1.83, but few received less than seventy cents, or more than a dollar a day. From Boston it was reported that the industry there was so intimately connected with that of the neighboring counties, Essex and Norfolk particularly, that it could not very well be separated. Many of the principal establishments in Boston also had shops in the country to which they furnished the stock and from which they received the manufactured product.

For the state as a whole the most reliable estimate of the number of persons employed in the industry is found in the industrial census of 1837. According to the *Tables of Industry* for that year, 15,000 women were engaged in the manufacture of boots and shoes, and in the same year there were only 14,757 women employed in the cotton factories. While it might appear from this census, therefore, that shoebinding had become numerically a more important occupation for women than work in the cotton mills, it was really much less important when considered from other points of view. Binding shoes like other kinds of home work was done irregularly. This was due in part to the fact that many women binders worked only in the intervals of household duties, and in part because work was not always furnished regularly by the factories and "bosses." It is of course always true that employers make a much greater effort to provide work constantly for factory employees than for home workers, since the latter are not paid for any of the time which is unemployed.

A large proportion therefore of the 15,000 women reported to be engaged in the manufacture of boots and shoes worked only in the interval of other duties, and their earnings were correspondingly small. The data for 1831 which have been given show that some of these women binders did not average more than eight or nine cents a day, and while many more earned from thirty to forty cents, very few earned as much as fifty or sixty cents. Women cotton operatives on the other hand worked in factories, and were regularly employed at what were then considered very good wages for women. Moreover, in the cotton

mills, some women were employed at highly skilled work, so that a capable ambitious girl could make very good wages indeed. In general, it would not be far wrong to say that what were regarded as "high" earnings for shoebinders corresponded roughly with the "low" earnings of women in the cotton mills. The class of women who worked in the two industries seems to have been, on the whole, pretty carefully differentiated, although they were all alike Americans of "good New England stock." Young, ambitious, unmarried women who could leave home preferred the cotton mills which offered to those who were industrious, skilled work, steady employment, and high wages. Married women and widows on the other hand naturally preferred work which could be done in their own homes and could be neglected when household cares were pressing. Other women who could not "be spared" at home, or those who still cherished a social prejudice against "factory hands," also preferred home work to mill work.

Social conditions in the towns and villages in which the making of boots and shoes had become an important industry were, on the whole, very favorable during this period. The trade had centered in eastern Massachusetts, where, in the "shoe villages," most of the workmen owned their own homes, and had quite a little adjoining land for vegetable gardens and fruit. There were said to be three times as many freeholders among the operatives in the boot and shoe industry as among the employees in the cotton, wool, or iron manufacture.¹⁶ How far this statement is trustworthy, it is not possible to say, but it is certainly true that so far as the textile industries are concerned, they employed a larger proportion of women and offered much better opportunities to women than did the manufacture of boots and shoes. The latter was much more a men's industry, demanding skilled men employees, and offering practically no skilled work for women. It was only natural, therefore, that the largest proportion of freeholders

¹⁶ *Proceedings of the Convention of the Manufacturers, Dealers, and Operatives in the Shoe and Leather Trade in the State of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1842), p. 30.

should be found in the industry which employed the largest proportion of skilled men. That both the men and women, however, formed a superior class of workpeople, native-born of good stock, intelligent, and reliable, there can be no question. Amasa Walker in an address before the "Convention of Manufacturers in the Shoe and Leather Business," in 1842, said, emphatically, that no villages "stood higher than the shoe villages of New England in the moral, social, and intellectual condition of their inhabitants. The population engaged in the trade was," he thought, "distinguished for general intelligence. The business was a social business, the people were not crowded together in factory buildings; their conversation was not drowned by the noise of machinery; they had many and great opportunities for reading and instruction, and mutual improvement."¹⁷

The women binders unfortunately did not have the advantages that came from working in groups as the men did. Every shoemaker's shop at that time was said to be a center of instruction and a place where political questions were threshed out.¹⁸ A statement frequently quoted at the time that "every shoemaker in Lynn was fit to be a United States senator"¹⁹ illustrates contemporary opinion of the craft.

Both shoemakers and shoebinders suffered in common with most of the working people of the time from the truck system.²⁰ Some "bosses" paid their binders exclusively in orders on dry-goods stores where they were mercilessly overcharged for what they bought, and a man who could advertise to "pay cash" had no difficulty in getting workpeople at any season. In general, however, higher rates were paid when orders were given.²¹

In striking contrast to these New England women and the conditions under which they were employed were the poor shoebinders of the larger cities who worked in wretched tenement homes, and who were really the victims of an early sweating

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, President's Address, p. 30.

¹⁸ Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

¹⁹ Quoted in *Reports of the Industrial Commission*, VII, 363.

²⁰ See p. 342 for an account of this system in the cotton industry.

²¹ Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

system. Matthew Carey, the early philanthropist and publicist, in an open letter of remonstrance²² regarding "the inadequate payment which females receive for their labor," said that the work for which women were notoriously underpaid both in New York and Philadelphia, included the folding and stitching of books, the sewing of carpet rags, the work done for the army and navy, and the binding of shoes. These were what one might call the "sweated trades" of the first half of the nineteenth century; and it is clear that, so far as working conditions were concerned, there was little in common between the shoebinders of the Massachusetts towns and villages and the shoebinders of the cities. The condition of these women was pictured as one of extreme wretchedness, and the "garret bosses" under whom they worked were undoubtedly heavy taskmasters.²³

But the work of women shoebinders everywhere, together with the work of the shoemakers, was destined to be completely revolutionized. In the year 1845, the first important labor-saving machine to be used in the manufacture of boots and shoes was introduced, and the third period in the history of the industry may be said to have begun. This period has been marked by a long series of remarkable mechanical inventions, the long-delayed establishment of the modern system, and the bringing to an end of the old primitive methods of work in the shoemakers' shops and binders' homes.

The machine which was invented in 1845 was for leather rolling, and was therefore not directly connected with the making of shoes, and did not in any way affect the work which women were doing. But within a few years the invention of the sewing-machine brought about the most radical change in the industry which has affected their work. It was soon discovered that the sewing-machine could be successfully used with dry thread for the work of "binding and stitching" which women had been doing by hand, and in 1852 the first machine for stitch-

²² M. Carey, *Essays on Public Charities of Philadelphia*. (Philadelphia, 1830), 5th ed.

²³ For an account of the system to which the garret-bosses belonged, see E. T. Freedley, *Philadelphia and Its Manufactures* (Philadelphia, 1867), p. 178.

ing shoe uppers was used in Lynn. The machine was a "Singer patent," and a woman operator was employed to run it.²⁴ When its superiority to the old method of closing and binding uppers by hand had been demonstrated, the machine soon came into very general use. The amount of work which a binder could do in a given period of time was, of course, vastly increased, and other changes necessarily followed. In Lynn stitching shops were started in various parts of the city. Steam-power was shortly substituted for foot-power in the running of the machines, and it became inevitable that the work should be transferred from the home to the factory.

Just before the introduction of the machine an increase not only in the number but in the proportion of women employees in the industry had been noted. This is indicated in the table given below, which shows the number of women employed in the manufacture of shoes in the state of Massachusetts and in the city of Lynn at the beginning and at the end of the decade.

CITY OF LYNN			STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS	
1845*		1855†	1845*	1850‡
Men.....	2,719	4,545	27,199	29,252
Women.....	3,209 (54%)	6,476 (59%)	18,678 (40%)	22,310 (43%)
Total.....	5,928	11,021	45,877	51,562

*Data for 1845 from *Massachusetts Tables of Industry*.

† From Hunt's *Merchant's Magazine*, XXXIII, 126.

‡ From *Census Data for 1850*.

No very great weight can be attached to conclusions drawn from this table, since the data are probably none of them very accurate. It is, nevertheless, interesting that the proportion of women employed in the industry increased from 54 to 59 per cent. for the city of Lynn, and from 40 to 43 per cent. for the state as a whole. This slightly greater increase in the proportion of women can perhaps be explained as the result of the introduction of the leather-rolling machine in 1845. With this machine, it was said that "a man could do in a minute what would require half an hour's hard work with a lap-stone and

²⁴ Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

hammer.”²⁵ The increase in proportion of women, therefore, probably did not mean that the kind or the quantity of work done by women had been changed, but merely that one of the processes carried on by men required fewer hands than formerly.²⁶ There had been no change up to this point in the division of labor between men and women.

In comparing the statistics given in the census of 1850 with those from the census of 1860, the results of the introduction of the sewing-machine are seen in the decrease both in the number and in the proportion of women employed. Data are not available for Lynn, but they are given for the United States and the state of Massachusetts.

	UNITED STATES		MASSACHUSETTS	
	1850	1860	1850	1860
Men.....	72,305	94,515	29,252	
Women.....	32,949 (31%)	28,515 (23%)	22,310 (44%)	
Total.....	105,254	123,029	51,562	

The percentage which women formed of all employees decreased, for the country as a whole, from 31 per cent. in 1850 to 23 per cent. in 1860, and the *Census of 1860* in commenting upon this change attributed it correctly enough to the increased use of the sewing-machine.²⁷

The year 1860 was a significant one in the industry because of the great shoemakers' strike in Lynn during that year. It was charged that the whole trade was "in an unhealthy condition," probably in part because of the necessity of rapid adjustment to new conditions. The object of the strike was higher wages, and while no attempt can be made here to follow the

²⁵ *Twelfth Census Manufactures*, III, 755.

²⁶ A writer in *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* (XXXIII, 126) said, in commenting on this increase in the number of women employed, "increased skill and intelligence have been brought to bear upon the manufacture by which female now accomplishes results greatly surpassing those of male industry in the former period, and also that in the face of a very important rise in hides and other raw materials, and of a large advance in wages."

²⁷ 1860 *Census of Manufactures*, lxvii.

various labor difficulties in the industry, this one is of special interest because the shoebinders were also on strike. A contemporary account relates that in several instances, at one time during a snowstorm, "large bodies of females appeared in the ranks." On one occasion hundreds of women "in grand procession" with the striking shoemakers formed "an imposing spectacle."²⁸

Other labor-saving inventions had been introduced in the industry in the years between 1845 and 1860—"rolling," "buffing," "splitting," and "racing" machines for preparing sole leather, the machines for cutting soles, taps, and heels, cable-wire nailers, sand-papering, heel-making, burnishing, and pegging machines; and with all of these the general substitution of steam for hand power.²⁹ No invention, however, changed the work of men as completely as the sewing-machine had changed the work of women. For binding and stitching had ceased to be a by-employment which women could carry on in as leisurely a fashion as they wished, and earn a few cents a day in their own homes. Women who worked at the sewing of uppers must now go to a factory and work regularly during a long working day. An account of a Haverhill factory in 1860 after the introduction of the pegging machine describes the various processes by which a shoe was then manufactured, all of which were carried on under one roof. The fourth story of one of the buildings was used as a stitching-room "occupied by ladies who tend the stitching-machines which are also run by steam, thus saving them from what otherwise must prove a laborious and fatiguing operation."³⁰

As the machine came to be more and more generally used, the piecework rates for work done at home must have been greatly reduced, and binders who could not go into factories and continued to do hand work, must have found their lot a very hard one. A Philadelphia shoebinder complained in 1862 that

²⁸ See the account in the *History of Lynn*, by Alonzo Lewis and James R. Newhall (Boston, 1865), p. 459.

²⁹ These inventions and others are enumerated in the 1905 *Census of Manufactures*, III, 242.

³⁰ Hunt's *Merchant's Magazine*, LIII, 471.

she was receiving only thirty-seven cents for work for which she had formerly been paid seventy-five cents.³¹

The old system was not of course swept out of existence all at once, and the introduction in 1862 of the wonderful McKay machine for sewing uppers to soles greatly accelerated the movement toward the concentration of the industry in factories, and other inventions and improvements between 1860 and 1870 gave it further impetus.

The McKay machine was introduced at a time when the industry was losing men on account of the war, and was said to do the work of the shoemakers who had gone to the front.³² This work of sewing uppers and soles together had always been done by men, but in the early experiments with the machine women seem to have been tried as operators. One instance is given of a woman in Haverhill who for three years earned about eighteen dollars a week at the McKay machine shortly after its introduction.³³ The machine was, however, at first run by foot-power, and operating it must have been heavy work. But the installation of power was not long delayed, and during this same decade other improvements and inventions added new machines driven by power to those already in use.³⁴

The factory system found its earliest and most complete development in Lynn. A report of the State Bureau of Labor in 1872,³⁵ in giving an account of the shoebinders, said that in Lynn work in all departments was largely done by machinery, and that each workman carried on one special process. At this time the work was confined to two seasons, each lasting about seventeen weeks. Women were given two to four days' work a

³¹ See a journalistic account of the hardships which women suffered as a result of the introduction of the sewing-machine in *Think and Act*, by Virginia Penny (Philadelphia, 1869), p. 32.

³² *In the Matter of the Application of Lyman Blake, etc.* (pamphlet, Boston Public Library), p. 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁴ For a full account of this period 1860-70 see Shaler, *United States of America*, II, 855-57. This account is briefly summarized in 1905 *Census of Manufactures*, III, 242, 243.

³⁵ *Third Annual Report*, pp. 103, 104.

week as the season began, with a gradual increase to full time during the rush season, which was followed again by a decrease. Wages during the busy season were very high for women, but it must not be forgotten that this was during the period of green-back inflation, when everything was high. Wages were reported for 1,026 women in Lynn, and out of this number nearly half were earning more than ten dollars a week, 135 were earning from twelve to fifteen dollars, and 68 from fifteen to eighteen dollars.³⁶

Two important strikes occurred in the industry during this year, both of them "women's strikes." In Stoneham, three hundred of the "Daughters of Crispin" Lodge,³⁷ employed as machine operators in three different factories, struck for higher rates on a certain kind of piecework; they were out of work for about two weeks when it became evident that their places could probably be filled without much difficulty, and the strike was declared off. The two leaders in the strike, however, according to a contemporary account, were not afterward admitted to any of the shops, and were only able "to obtain work of an inferior kind, which they were obliged to do at home."³⁸

The Lynn strike of the same year was a much more important one. It began at first in one or two shoe-stitching shops, but finally extended throughout the city. It was caused by "an attempt of the boss-stitchers (employers) to reduce the wages of those receiving the highest wages one-seventh per cent., and increasing the lowest-paid as much, to establish more uniform prices." The women protested with great spirit "against any

³⁶ *Third Annual Report of the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor*, p. 104. Under the shoemaking industry, a report is given of the wages of 1,867 women in the form of a classified wage-table with the following totals; 563 women at \$8 a week, 408 at \$9, 514 from \$10 to \$12, 247 from \$12 to \$15, 135 from \$15 to \$18.

³⁷ An attempt to write the history of women in trade unionism has already been disclaimed, but strikes and labor difficulties are occasionally noted when they seem to throw light upon the relation of women to the industry. Early labor organizations among the shoemakers were called Lodges of the Knights of St. Crispin, and women, who often had lodges of their own, were "Ladies of St. Crispin." See Herron, *Labor Organization among Women*, p. 5.

³⁸ *Third Annual Report of the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor* (1872) pp. 436, 437.

reduction of wages on any pretext whatever." The "boss-stitchers" then agreed among themselves to compel every woman employed by one of their number to sign a certificate agreeing to give two weeks' notice before stopping or to forfeit five dollars. The women shoestitchers again acted with promptness and courage. At a meeting which was attended by about nine hundred of the women who were affected by the order, it was unanimously voted "that they could not comply with the resolution, nor submit to any rule or regulation binding them, that did not likewise affect their employers." The resolutions which were passed at that meeting are of sufficient interest to be quoted at length, since they throw a good deal of light upon the character of the women shoe operatives of this period.

We, the working-women, in convention assembled, do accept the following resolutions, as an earnest expression of our sentiments:

WHEREAS, we have long been sensible of the need of protecting our rights and privileges, as free-born women, and are determined to defend them and our interest as working-women, to the fullest extent of our ability: therefore, be it

Resolved, That we, the working-women of Lynn, known as Upper Fitters and Finishers of Boots and Shoes, do enter a most solemn protest against any reduction of wages, on any pretext whatever; and that we will not submit to any rules binding upon us, that do not equally affect our employers.

Resolved, That we feel grateful to the shoemakers of Lynn, for their interest and determination to stand by us in our time of need.

Resolved, That we, the free women of Lynn, will submit to no rules or set of rules that tend to degrade and enslave us.

Resolved, That we will accept no terms whatever, either with regard to a reduction of prices, notices to quit, or forfeiture of wages. That while we utterly ignore the spirit of selfishness and illiberality, which prompted the late action of our would-be oppressors, we will not hesitate to resist, in a proper manner, the unjust encroachments upon our rights.

Resolved, That a copy of these resolutions be given to each one of the Committee, to be, by them, presented to each girl in every shop, and her signature thereon obtained, that she will adhere to the terms of the resolutions; and should any one of the employees of the shop be reduced in her wages, or ill treated, we will desist from our work until she has obtained her rights.

Resolved, That a copy of the above be inserted in the Lynn papers, and a large surplus number be provided for distribution among the girls.

These resolutions were not only distributed in every shop in Lynn, but published in two of the leading newspapers as well. The "bosses" were afraid to carry on the contest in the face of such united action, and the shoestitchers won the day. Their wages were unmolested, and the obnoxious certificates were never issued.³⁹

Looking at the work done by women in the early 70's, after the application of machinery and the removal of the industry from the shops and homes to the factories, it appears that the division of labor between men and women was altered very little if at all by these revolutionary changes. Men still did the cutting,⁴⁰ earning about three dollars a day in Lynn, and they continued to do the work of sewing uppers to soles, using the new McKay machines instead of the old laborious hand sewing or pegging. For operating the new machines, they received from twenty-five to forty dollars a week.⁴¹ Women and girls were still almost exclusively engaged in fitting and sewing shoe uppers, earning at this time from seven to fourteen dollars a week. An employer from Stoughton reported that as fitters, "girls and women of all ages from thirteen up" were employed and paid from fifty cents to three dollars a day.

The work of these fitters, however, was only a part of the work which the old binders had done, for the "fitter," as the name indicates, merely fitted or pasted linings to uppers, and got the work ready to be stitched on the machine. "Lasting" in preparation for the sewing-together of soles and uppers by the McKay machine, was done by both men and women, the women earning from twelve to twenty dollars a week, the men from thirty-six to forty.⁴² "Heeling" and "finishing" were done

³⁹ The account of this strike is given in the *Third Annual Report of the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor*, pp. 434-36.

⁴⁰ The following statements regarding work and wages are from *Re Blake*, pp. 40-48. The quotations are all from Lynn and Stoughton.

⁴¹ The caution should be repeated that quotations of wages from 1861-79 are on a "greenback" basis.

⁴² Just how the work of men and women differed in this occupation, if there was a difference, it has not been possible to discover.

by men as they always had been⁴³ and at that time for wages of three or four dollars a day.

It would seem, therefore, that in this early period immediately following the establishment of the machine system, both men and women were doing much the same work as they had done before. The method of working had been radically changed, but this had not altered the line of delimitation which had of old been drawn between the work of the shoemaker and the shoebinder. Women were making uppers, stitching and binding by machine, and men were "bottoming," putting on soles by machine. If either had encroached upon a field belonging to the other, the results were not visible at this time.

Attention should be called here, perhaps, to the fact that although the industry had become so generally a factory industry by 1870, the old hand processes had not altogether disappeared. In 1875, the *State Census of Massachusetts* still reported⁴⁴ 1,518 women in the boot and shoe manufacture employed in their own homes, and although fifteen hundred is quite insignificant compared with the twenty-two thousand women who were employed in this manner in 1850 just before the introduction of the sewing-machine, it indicates that the hand industry had not altogether died out. There remained, even after the introduction of machinery, a considerable trade in hand-made goods, women's "buskins" and slippers, and ankle-ties for children. A manufacturer who produced such goods reported in 1872 that the work was done by both men and women. The women did the binding with leather, and the rest of the work was done by men, who were usually small farmers, and who worked at shoemaking only part of the time. He found it impossible to estimate the earnings of either shoemak-

⁴³ There had been no heels on ladies' shoes from about 1830 to 1855, but after this time heels came back into fashion, and journeymen were employed to "heel" shoes and "heeling" became a special process. See Johnson, *Lynn*, p. 340.

⁴⁴ *Massachusetts Census* (1875), II, 825. Of these 1,518 women, 575 were reported from Lynn, 225 from Haverhill, 101 from Marblehead, and smaller numbers for other towns.

ers or binders, because, he said, "they work at home and as and when they please."⁴⁵

The further question which concerns us is whether, in the period of more than a quarter of a century, the mechanical changes and improvements which have taken place have resulted in changing the work done by women in the industry, or in increasing the proportion of women employed. A very interesting general statement on this point which is found in the report of the federal Bureau of Labor on Hand and Machine Labor,⁴⁶ is as follows:

As regards the displacement of males by females, it should also be noted that in the New England states there are comparatively few factories in the shoe industry where this has taken place, though in the shoe factories in other sections of the country it is not uncommon to find women and girls operating machines and doing work that was formerly done by men. On the other hand, in states west and south of New England, men and boys have for years been largely employed in the upper-stitching department, while in New England, and particularly in the province of women's shoes, this part of the work has always been reserved for females.

The *Census* has commented upon this point from time to time. In 1880, the report of a manufacturer, who had stated that the introduction of the sewing-machine had greatly increased the number of women employed, was declared to be perhaps

a correct statement so far as it applies to the manufactories directly, but . . . hardly a correct one if all the women employed under the old system are considered. Under the system in vogue before the introduction of the sewing-machine, employment was given to large numbers of women at their homes. This method has almost entirely ceased with the introduction of machinery. More women are employed in the works than formerly, but many less outside.⁴⁷

In 1900, the *Twelfth Census* called attention to the fact that in the industry of boots and shoes, from 1890 to 1900 there was a remarkable increase in the number of women and children

⁴⁵ *Third Annual Report of the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor* (1872), p. 131.

⁴⁶ *Thirteenth Annual Report* (1898), p. 122.

⁴⁷ *Ninth Census*, Vol. XX, Special Report by Joseph D. Weeks, p. 15.

employed, while the number of men showed an actual decrease from 91,406 to 91,215. The explanation given by the *Census* was that "women are largely taking the places of men in this industry in the operation of the lighter kind of machinery, and children are to a considerable extent succeeding to the places made vacant by women."⁴⁸ Part of this increase, however, was probably due to some changes in the preparation of leather which it seems fair to regard as indirectly connected with the industry. The census pointed out that in the tanning of leather, by reason of improved machinery, there had been a constantly decreasing demand for skilled workmen. "Women and girls are now performing the work of men."⁴⁹

The census statistics showing the increase in the number of women employed during the last twenty-five years, are presented in the table below :

BOOTS AND SHOES*—FACTORY PRODUCT. NUMBER OF PERSONS EMPLOYED 1880-1905

	Men	Women	Children under Sixteen	Percentage of Women to Total Employees
1880.....	82,547	25,122	3,483	23
1890.....	91,406	39,849	2,435	30
1900.....	90,415	46,894	4,521	33
1905.....	95,257	49,535	5,132	33

* Statistics from the earlier censuses are excluded from this table as not properly comparable with the data which are given. These data are for "boots and shoes—factory product," while in the census reports prior to 1880, data for "boots and shoes—factory product" and "boots and shoes—custom work and repairing," were so combined that the data cannot be correctly segregated. See the 1905 *Census of Manufactures*, III, 229.

Such statistical evidence as we have in this table shows quite plainly that while there was a striking increase in the proportion of women employed from 1880 to 1890, since that time the movement, if it may be so called, has gradually died out. The increase was only 3 per cent. from 1890-1900, and since 1900 there has been no change at all.

Perhaps the most satisfactory method of ascertaining how far the old lines of demarkation between men's work and women's work have been eliminated is to examine for some

⁴⁸ *Twelfth Census*, "Manufactures," I, cxxvii.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, cxiv.

individual factories the actual number of men and women employed today in the different processes. Such factory records are furnished us, without prejudice of choice, in one of the special reports of the commissioner of labor. While collected for another purpose, they show clearly what the division of labor between men and women is at the present time.

NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN EMPLOYED IN TWO SHOE FACTORIES IN 1904*

	UNION FACTORY		NON-UNION FACTORY	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Cutting-room, upper stock and trimming ..	239	5	205	10
Cutting-room, sole stock and trimming....	148	15	176	25
Fitting and stitching-room	101	351	117	309
Gang or bottoming-rooms.....	620	...	807	...
Finishing-rooms.....	141	...	132	4
Dressing-rooms.....	98	35	110	52
Total.....	1,347	406	1,547	400

* From *Eleventh Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor*, "Regulation and Restriction of Output" (1904), pp. 592, 593.

An examination of these factory records shows that the large proportion of women employees—86 per cent. in one establishment, and 77 per cent. in the other—are still engaged in the work of sewing uppers, which, although done with power machines, is essentially the same process which was carried on in the old days in fishermen's cottages and in village homes.

Moreover, it should be noted that work which was so exclusively done by women in the period preceding the establishment of the factory system is now shared with men. In one establishment 27 per cent. of the employees in the fitting- and stitching-room were men, and in the other 22 per cent. were men. It is, of course, also significant that 14 per cent. of the women in one factory, and 23 per cent. in the other, are engaged in other processes which were formerly carried on almost wholly by men. It seems clear, however, that the radical changes of the last twenty-five years in the place and the method of work have altered only very slightly the old line of division between

“men’s work” and “women’s work.” The line is less distinct, possibly, but it is still drawn in much the same place.

Attention should be called to the fact that the factory records given above are very greatly simplified. The displacement of hand methods by machinery has resulted in the most elaborate division of processes within the six large groups which are indicated in the table. This can best be illustrated by giving as a concrete example an account of the way in which the work in the stitching-room, which corresponds to “binding and sewing” done by women in the earlier period, is subdivided today. There are now forty-eight different occupations carried on in this room, and while an enumeration of them may be tedious, nothing short of this can indicate how minute this division of labor has become. The last census volume dealing with *Employees and Wages* gives the following list of the various classes of operatives employed in the stitching-rooms:⁵⁰ Skivers, cementers, pasters, folders (these all employed in the work of preparation), upper stitchers, eyelet row stitchers, seam rubbers, seam pounders, gore stitchers, gusset stitchers, lining stitchers, lining makers, liners, closers on, in-seamers, vamp liners, facing stitchers, beaders, top stitchers, carders, button-hole machine operators, button hole finishers, button sewers, punchers (of holes for eyelets), gang punch operators, eyeleters, fastener setters, hookers, markers (of vamp tips), top markers, tip stitchers, tippers, tip pasters, perforators, tip fixers, vamp closers, vampers, barrers, stayers, heelstay stitchers, eyelet stay stitchers, fancy stitchers, foxing stitchers, tongue binders, tongue stitchers, strap makers, table workers, and table hands.

It should be emphasized that this list includes only the operatives in one single department, the stitching-room, and that the work which has been subdivided into these forty-eight processes was formerly a single process done by one woman in the days before the invention of the sewing-machine. The same census volume from which this list was taken gives for the whole industry 126 different classes of operatives. There is probably no

⁵⁰ *Twelfth Census* (1900), Special Report on Employees and Wages, by Davis R. Dewey, pp. 1198-1201.

industry today in which the subdivision of labor is more minute, or in which the substitution of machine for hand labor has been more complete.

In the first part of this article certain points of contrast were noted between the "boot and shoe" industry and the cotton manufacture, and it may be well to summarize these briefly: shoemaking had always been men's work historically, while the making of cloth had in large part been done by women; in the first half of the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution was taking place in the cotton industry, while boots and shoes continued to be made by the old hand processes; of the two industries, the cotton mills during this period offered greater inducements to women, while "boots and shoes" with heavy skilled work demanding a regular apprenticeship, and offering high wages and independent conditions of employment, was more attractive to men. The cotton mills, therefore, continued through the first half of the nineteenth century to be a women's industry; shoemaking remained a men's trade, although a system of division of labor had made it possible to employ large numbers of women for one of the intermediate processes.

In conclusion, a further point of contrast between the two industries may be noted. Since 1850 one of the most striking changes that has occurred in the cotton industry has been the increase in the proportion of men employed in the mills. The number of men operatives has increased so rapidly that they now outnumber the women, and the last census has called attention to the fact that men are displacing women in the cotton manufacture. Moreover, the men, who have been driving the women out of the mills are few of them Americans. In round numbers 28,000 of the 39,000 men employed as cotton operatives in Massachusetts during the taking of the most recent census were foreign-born, and nearly 9,000 more were the native-born sons of foreign-born parents.⁵¹ The foreign element among the women operatives is quite as large. In brief, then, the tendency during the last half-century has been toward

⁵⁰ These data are from the *Twelfth Census: Occupations*. The census of manufactures does not give statistics relating to nationality.

the displacement of women operatives by men, and toward the substitution of immigrant for American labor.

In "boots and shoes," on the other hand, there has been an increase in the proportion of women employees, although not a sufficiently large increase to indicate any tendency toward the driving-out of the men operatives. Shoemaking remains a men's industry. The industry also remains predominantly American, with a large proportion of both men and women operatives native-born. A comparison of the data from the last census, showing the general nativity of the operatives of both industries, is of interest. Statistics are given for Massachusetts,⁵² the state which historically has taken the lead in both industries.

	MEN		WOMEN	
	Boots and Shoes	Cotton Mill Operatives	Boots and Shoes	Cotton Mill Operatives
Native-born { Native parents ..	20,512	1,925	5,761	2,045
{ Foreign parents ..	13,941	8,849	8,208	10,024
Foreign-born.....	14,016	28,092	3,181	25,843
Total.....	48,469	38,889	16,970	37,912

These data show very clearly that while the great majority of cotton mill employees, both men and women, are foreign-born in the boot and shoe industry 72 per cent. of the men and 81 per cent. of the women are native-born. There are perhaps two rather obvious reasons why immigrant labor has not been introduced to any great extent in the shoe factories. In spite of the fact that machinery has been applied to practically every minute process into which the making of shoes can be divided, the work continues to demand skilled and responsible operatives, and the level of wages has been kept so high that the industry continues to attract the more intelligent native-born working people.⁵³ The following wage statistics from the

⁵² From *Twelfth Census* (1900), "Occupations."

⁵³ An operative from a Massachusetts town which contained both cotton mills and shoe factories in his testimony before the state bureau of labor, said with regard to the frequent changes in the working force of the cotton mills: "There is shoemaking in town for boys, and a great deal of stitching on ma-

Twelfth Census are given to show the contrast between the two industries with respect to this point.

WAGES IN COTTON MILLS AND BOOT AND SHOE FACTORIES IN
NEW ENGLAND

	MEDIAN WAGE*		QUARTILES*	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Cotton mills.....	\$ 8.50	\$6.00	\$6.50-11.99	\$5.00-7.99
Boots and shoes.....	12.00	7.00	9.00-15.49	6.00-9.49

* These data are taken from Professor Dewey's Report on *Employees and Wages* (1903). The median wage together with the two quartiles is considered less misleading than the average wage alone. The "median" is the wage of the operative who stands exactly half way up the wage scale, i. e., half of the operatives are paid less and half are paid more; the first "quartile" is the wage of the employee who stands one-fourth of the way up the scale and the second quartile that of the employee who is three-fourths of the way up. To illustrate with the data given above, one-fourth of the men employed in the cotton industry do not get more than \$6.50 a week, or half do not get more than \$8.50, and three-fourths do not get above \$11.99. These data therefore make possible a comparison of the wage-scale at three points.

It is, of course, quite obvious that by the payment of high wages, the boot and shoe industry has been able to hold its American working people as the cotton industry has not. There is, however, another possible explanation of this point in the fact that the shoe manufacture is one of the industries in which America has pioneered. In the cotton industry, immigrant operatives were quite likely to be equal and even superior to the native-born in skill and training, but American methods in the making of shoes have been unique, and immigrant labor therefore has meant for this industry unskilled labor, only a limited amount of which could be utilized.

chines, for girls. Their wages in the mill are very low—some ten to sixteen dollars a month—and as soon as the children are old enough they leave; the girls going to the stitching machines, the boys to shoemaking."—*Report* for 1872, p. 389.